

Jim Stringer



The Music Room

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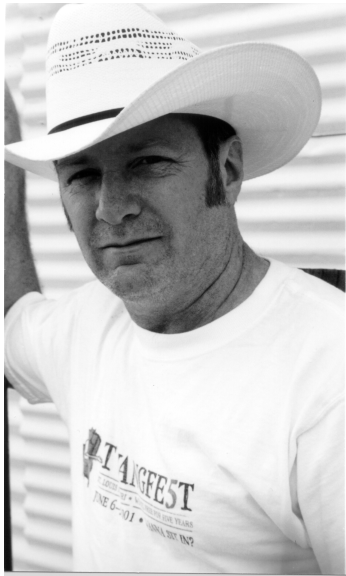


Photo by Dana Lynne

JIM STRINGER BIO

Jim Stringer started playing guitar at the age of eight and hasn't stopped since. It was 1956 and Elvis Presley had been featured on Ed Sullivan and Steve Allen's television shows. The impression cast was indelible. An unrelenting campaign against his parents finally resulted in a Christmas present... a rough but playable 3/4 size guitar decorated with a picture of Roy Rogers atop Trigger.

"The first songs I remember playing were *Red River Valley*, *She'll Be Comin' Round the Mountain*... common country-folk tunes," Stringer recalls. "They were in the book that came with the guitar... not exactly the rock and roll I'd envisioned, but it was a start."

Stringer progressed through several guitars and many songs and by age 12, he'd started his own band with a "bassist" (another kid with a guitar tuned down a fifth) and a drummer. The repertoire was entirely instrumental... The Ventures, Duane Eddy, Bill Black as well as some original material. The band performed frequently at parties and social events.

"I wanted to sing, too," he adds, "but when I sang at home, my older brother would tease me relentlessly... he was a little more respectful of my guitar playing. Still, it took me awhile to get my nerve up to sing in public."

Though bands came and went, the music continued and while Stringer was in college at the University of Kansas, he formed a band with drummer Steve Hall called *The Upside Dawne*. The band featured the midwest's first psychedelic light show and included future Nashville music mogul, Garth Fundis, and Blue Riddim Band vocalist, Scott Korchak.

While *The Upside Dawne* was commercially successful, Hall and Stringer hungered for a more complete artistic experience. In 1968, they joined with bassist, Paul Miller, and multi instrumentalist, Tim Smith, to form *Tide*, an eclectic ensemble whose sound was like no other... a mix of free jazz, country, blues and rock 'n roll. The band became a regional favorite and toured constantly from Minnesota to Texas, between the Mississippi and the Rockies. The band's one LP, *Almost Live*, was distributed nationally and is now considered a rare collector's item. TIDE was known for instrumental virtuosity, original compositions and fearless improvisations. The band had it's own rehearsal space which Stringer turned into one of the first semipro equipped studios. He recorded not only TIDE's music, but dozens of other local and regional bands.

In 1974 after several years of relentless travel, hard work and near misses, Stringer left TIDE and took a full time job with a motion picture producer. Among his duties were scoring of films.

"I learned so much about the craft of recording during those years," he reflects. "You're always on a time schedule, but there's no slack cut as far as the quality required... you just have to do top-notch work real fast."

Though the full time job made touring impossible, Stringer worked as a hired gun for other bands, including *The Billy Spears Band*, which also counts Junior Brown as an alumnus. Stringer also continued writing and recording his own music. Over an eleven year span, he wrote over 800 pieces of film music, advertising jingles and songs, produced projects for other bands, and kept his own band working locally.

"Those years were not the most artistically satisfying... I mean, how much emotion can you put into a Toyota jingle? But it was an education, to say the least," he muses. "I played alot of jazz... there was a first rate jazz club in Lawrence, where I was living. Players would come to town and need a band... I often got the call. I played with Joe Williams, Eddie Harris, Bobby Shew, Gary Foster and others. Kansas City jazz greats Jay McShann and Claude "Fiddler" Williams would often perform as sidemen with the house band, too, so I frequently got to play with those guys as well."

After leaving the film company in 1985, he restarted his performance career in earnest. Along with guitarist/singer Susan Hyde (now performing with Bill & Bonnie Hearne) he formed *The Novellas*, rejoining with former TIDE drummer Steve Hall, pedal-steel player Mike Paholski, and bassist Russ Colombo. The band's sound was "rock and roll wearing cowboy boots and shaking a spear" according to one reviewer. While the band was not a popular hit, they became favorites with local musicians.

"We played in front of lots of people... we did one gig with Emmylou where there were 26,000 people. But we never really caught on with local crowds.... they didn't know what to think of us. I mean, were we country with the pedal steel? World beat with Steve's array of percussion? The only crowd we could count on was other musicians who'd pop in to see us after their own gigs."

The Novellas released one record, *Gladys and Other Girls*, for a small label, *Gardylloo Records*, in 1989. Though the record

received warm reviews, it went largely unnoticed by the general public.

During the interim, Stringer and Hyde had started a side project with an upright bassist, Kelley Mascher and ex-Paladin's drummer, Scott Campbell, playing just snare drum. *The Stringers* mission was *acoustic rockabilly*. Once again, the band was a popular head-scratcher, but an artistic success. The band's life included several personnel changes which included *Rainmaker's* drummer, Pat Tomek. and two recordings, an eponymous EP and the full length, *Rik Rak Rok*. The group disbanded in late 1993 when Stringer, impressed with the music that was coming from Texas, decided to take his act to Austin.

In Austin, Stringer set up a small project studio in his home, and after a short, intensive time of performing and networking, he conceived an all instrumental country-jazz project with fellow guitarists Dave Biller (Dale Watson, Asylum St. Spankers), Joel Hamilton (Clay Blaker), Casper Rawls (Leroi Brothers), Sean Mencher (High Noon), Brian Hofeldt (The Derailers), and Scott Walls (Don Walser). Produced by Stringer, *Travis County Pickin'* was released on Hightone Records in 1997.

"This was like the opposite of my jingle recording career... we took all the time we needed to get the sound we wanted. I told the other players that we'd play it till it felt right... and just have fun! I think the proof's in the pudding on that one."

Concurrently, Stringer formed a "post 50's rock and roll band", *Git Gone*, with upright bassist, Sharon Ward, and drummer, Karen Biller. The band often played six nights a week in and around Austin. After Biller left to join The Cornell Hurd Band, *Git Gone* added former Dale Watson sideman, Lee Potter, on drums. With this lineup, *Git Gone* recorded the 1998 release, *Gone Rockin'* for the new Music Room label. The CD was well received and quickly sold out of the initial pressing. *Git Gone* continued to perform, playing throughout the central US. In 1997, they were featured at the country music festival in Vinstra, Norway.

In late 1997, Stringer formed *The AM Band*. The band would be both an outlet for Stringer's original material, and a stable platform for more complex instrumental arrangements and vocal harmonies. Originally formed with Lee Potter and Austin journeyman bassist, Dave Wesselowski, Stringer added piano ace, T Jarrod Bonta in March of 1998. Later, Carl Keesee replaced Wesselowski. Over the bands' 5 year life, the roster has included guitarist Boomer Norman (Stop The Truck), guitarist/vocalist Gene Kurtz (Roy Head & the Traits), drummer Kevin Hall (Archie Bell & The Drells), drummer John Hahn (Radney Foster, Rosie Flores), and Austin Chronicle Hall of Fame inductee, Charlie Prichard (Cat Mother & the All Night Newsboys). Frequent featured vocalists include Alan Barnette, Mitzi Henry, Susan Maxie and Li'l Rachel.

"I'm really proud of the AM Band. It's named for a comment by Lisa Pankratz... 'there's only ONE band in Austin and everyone plays in it.' The AM stands for *Austin Music*. Also, I like the connotation of the AM band on radio... all our music is based on the time that AM radio dominated the airwaves -- in my mind, that's the real golden age of American music!"

The AM Band's 1999 release, *Swang*, was widely reviewed in national and international publications.

"I got tear sheets from all over the world... Uruguay, Norway, Sweden, UK, Belgium. Most of them I couldn't read... but I think 'ge-rockin' is a positive term."

The AM Band's second release, *On The Radio*, was recorded in February of 2000 and has taken time to complete between Austin's infamous allergy seasons and Stringer's many commitments. The CD was released nationally in June of 2001. A new CD, "In My Hand" is in the works and will be release in May of 2004.

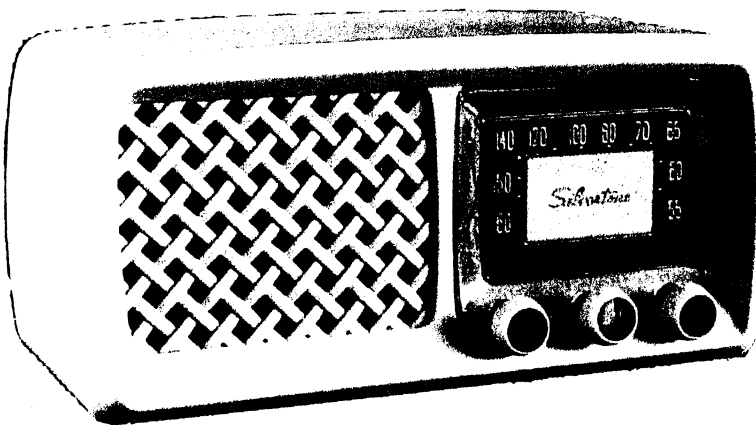
Stringer stays busy. He co-produced Ted Roddy's critically acclaimed *Tear Time*, also released by The Music Room. Karen Poston's CD, *Real Bad*, another of Stringer's Music Room productions, contained her song *Lydia* which was also released as a single by *Slaid Cleaves*. Most recently, he produced a CD for Susanna Van Tassel, *My Little Star*.

Stringer performs regularly with Roger Wallace, Ted Roddy, Susanna Van Tassel, and when time permits, performs and records with other Austin acts, including in the recent past, Marti Brom, Wayne Hancock, Charlie Burton's Texas Twelve Steppers and others. Though he stays close to home as a rule, he's played throughout the US and on several occasions has toured in Austria, Germany, Denmark, Switzerland, Norway and Sweden.

"The thing I love about touring is meeting people... particularly other guitar players and musicians in general. It broaden's your scope. I'd like to do another guitar record... only on this one, each track would feature some guitar player I've met while touring... an international musical quilt. But, first, I'll have to free up some time."

3rd COAST MUSIC

Jim Stringer
and the
Austin
AMusic
Band



**JOHN THE REVELATOR
COMINGS & GOINGS**

#29/118 JUNE 1999

REVIEWS

***** (or not)

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DARCIE DEAVILLE

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FRED EAGLESMITH

FREDDY FENDER

**GERALD HASLAM
Workin' Man Blues**

TERRI HENDRIX

ROY ROGERS

**JIM STRINGER & THE
AUSTIN MUSIC BAND**

SWING WEST!

TOWNES VAN ZANDT

pardon me, I've got someone to review

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art & grit

JIM STRINGER & THE AUSTIN MUSIC BAND SWANG!

(The Music Room)

Reason the cover is the band's logo rather than a picture of them is that Jim Stringer doesn't want to jinx the group he's so painstakingly assembled. "In my experience, as soon as you get publicity pictures taken of a band, somebody always leaves." When I suggested using the radio, which, by the way, will be making a featured appearance at the CD release party, he said, "That's fine. Nobody cares what we look like anyway. We're not a pretty boy band."

◆ Pretty or not, the Austin Music Band is the closest thing Austin has to a supergroup. Musicians' musicians is an expression that carries the unfortunate, but unavoidable, sub-text, "you've never heard of them," and certainly Jim Stringer and Boomer Norman guitars, T Jarrod Bonta piano, Carl Keese bass, Lee Potter drums and Alan Barnett vocals, are not names with which, say, the *Chronicle's* Austin Music Awards will have made you familiar. However, their collective resume includes over 60 album credits and God knows how many gigs with how many different bands. This, you might say, is not an outfit that has to worry much about weak links.

◆ The AM Band evolved out of Travis County Pickin', the all star country-jazz instrumental album Stringer supervised for HighTone. Wanting to put together a promotional tour for the album, Stringer immediately ran into the difficulty that every track featured a different rhythm section, so he envisaged a roadshow in which featured pickers would be backed by a house band, but though he assembled the basic trio in late 1997, the tour never got off the ground. At the same time, Sharon Ward, Git Gone's bassplayer/vocalist, began having to be out of town a lot on business, curtailing the rockabilly trio's activities, so Stringer needed another outlet. "I deliberately set out to differentiate from Git Gone and keep away from rockabilly. Sharon's such a great singer, also the group's visual identity, and I didn't want people to think this was a cutrate substitute for the real Git Gone."

◆ The name came from a joking remark by Lisa Pankratz, "There's only one Austin band and everyone plays in it." Slowly the trio began to expand, first adding T Jarrod Bonta. "He sat in with us one night, his 18th birthday, and opened my eyes to what the sound could be. Then we asked Boomer (Norman) to join us. You know how Boomer is, he likes to keep his options open, but after a while he started turning down other gigs to play with us. Finally, I heard Alan Barnett, who was with a group called Psychic Cowboys, sing and he just knocked me out, great stylist and very soulful. He's a better singer than I am, but we use him as a featured vocalist, doing maybe five songs an hour, so people will pay attention, not start tuning him out."

◆ The album title is a composite of swing and twang. "Swang sounds better than 'twing.' At first, there was some confusion in the repertoire because we weren't trying to be just a swing or Western Swing or country band, but we weren't trying to stretch any of those genres too far either. Artie Shaw's *Special Delivery Stomp* is a perfect example of what works for us, swing with a hillbilly attitude. Lee's drumming is the key, he makes it all come together. Now we gauge everything by how it fits in."

◆ The nine covers among the 16 tracks embrace classic swing, country, blues, R&B and rock & roll, juxtaposing Louis Jordan (*Texas & Pacific* and *Jack, You're Dead*), Big Boy Arthur Crudup (*My Baby Left Me*), Wynn Stewart (*Long Black Limousine*), Chuck Berry (*Thirty Days*), Hank Snow (Dan Robertson's *Ninety Miles Per Hour [Down A Dead End Street]*), Artie Shaw (*Special Delivery Stomp*), Johnny Bond (*Sick, Sober And Sorry*), Bobby Bland (*36-22-36*) and Mel Tillis (*No Love Have I*). But the swang thing sure works well in the hands of this powerhouse outfit, which brings a convincing sense of unity to this diverse material. Interspersed among the covers are seven equally diverse Stringer originals, from the blistering country-jazz instrumental *Onward*, *Charlie Christian's Soldiers* to a *Don't Be Cruel* inspired rock & roll ballad replete with Jordanaires style doo-wopping. The AM Band is rather the best of both worlds. Austin picking at its finest but not the usual raggedyass jamming, and tight as a drum ensemble playing with Austin flair and style.

◆ Like a latterday, and smaller scale, Duke Ellington, Stringer has, until the last few months, financed the group out of his own pocket. "We've never had a bad night and there's never been any friction. For all of us, I sincerely believe, this is our favorite thing to do and if I have to spend my own money to keep a band this good together, I'll do it." Recently things have been picking up, but what pleases Stringer most isn't the size of the crowd but it's makeup. "Not a single hipster, just real people who love the music. Maybe that ought to be our motto: Real Music For Real People."

◆ Stringer dreams of the AM Band hosting a Hayride or Hometown Jamboree kind of show, with featured vocalists, guest pickers and a series of albums. In the meantime, a follow-up, showcasing T Jarrod Bonta (just guessing, but I imagine there'll be at least one Jerry Lee number), is in the works. JC

Jim Stringer & The Austin Music Band:

It don't mean a thang
if it ain't got that swang

Though a seemingly endless line of talented Texans have helped Austin remain a roots-music mecca for decades, the city's pool of talent has grown considerably deeper through the relocation of artists from other regions of the country.

A good case in point is Jim Stringer, who moved to Austin in 1994 from Lawrence, Kansas, and quickly made an impact with his rockabilly trio, Git Gone. Fronted by bassist/vocalist Sharon Ward, the group had started to acquire a following from its weekly gigs at the Carousel Lounge, a decidedly untrendy neighborhood bar, when Ward's day job began to take her out of town on a more frequent basis, preventing them from expanding on their growing reputation.

Stringer, though, was eager to explore other musical avenues. His first such project was *Travis County Pickin'*, an album of country-jazz instrumentals released on High-Tone in 1997 and featuring collaborations with members of the Derailers, High Noon, the LeRoi Brothers and other Austin acts, as well as noted steel player Lloyd Maines and the late drummer Donald Lindley.

Later in '97, Stringer formed another trio with drummer Lee Potter and bassist Dave Wesselowski that veered more in the direction of country and swing. Shortly thereafter, T Jarrod Bonta, a piano player with startling chops, sat in with them on his 18th birthday and opened up the band's sound tremendously.

"Austin logic generally has it that there are a lot of guitar players here, but it's not the case," says Stringer. "I mean, there are a lot of singer-songwriters who can play their

own songs, but there are not a lot of *real players*. And the Austin Music Band is composed of real players."

In addition to the aforementioned members, the group includes guitarist Boomer Norman, bassist Carl Keese (who took over for Wesselowski), and singer Alan Barnet, who trades off lead vocal duties with Stringer. Between them, the members of the AM Band have collectively played with over 60 Austin acts.

"It makes me feel guilty once in awhile," Stringer says. "Wayne [Hancock] called me today and wanted me to go out on a three-week tour with him. I can't do it because I have things I have to attend to at home. My calendar is full for the next two months."

Bonta takes a sip of his iced tea and adds with a grin, "I've had four days off this month and I'm scheduled for just two next month."

dictatorship. One of the reasons T and I get along so well is because we have a common outlook. When it's my band, we play it my way; the rest of the band understands that. They've been in the position of bandleader and sideman. Each is different and they understand how it works....With anyone that I play with, if I don't feel like someone's in control, I'm running for the door."

Regardless of how it's run, the Austin Music Band puts on a fabulous show and has recorded a remarkably diverse set of music on *Swang*. Stringer's originals range from the cowboy-jazz instrumental "Onward, Charlie Christian's Soldiers" to the swamp-rocking "Bye-Bye, Bayou", while the band covers material from the likes of Louis Jordan, Wynn Stewart, Chuck Berry, Hank Snow, Bobby Bland, Mel Tillis and Artie Shaw.

The group has taken up residence at the



JIM AND HIS SIX STRINGED FRIEND

When they're not supporting other musicians, they can be found playing their brand of twang and swing that comes out as *Swang*, the title of their self-released debut disc. "The mission statement for the band is, 'anything I like'," Stringer explains. "But there is a criteria here, and I feel like we stay within it most of the time. We tried to take everything and put it through our filter and see what comes out. As long as it's in a certain range."

Bonta interrupts: "He's a dictator."

Stringer doesn't miss a beat: "This is a

Carousel Lounge every Thursday night, while taking occasional weekend trips out of town. "I can't ask top-flight musicians to come out and play for nothing," Stringer says. "I've made more money doing various kinds of music for commercials than I did in clubs. It's rare that I can get together a band and promise them \$100 a night; \$50 a night is good. The amount of work and the quality of work is good, but the economics of the whole thing aren't."

—JIM CALIGIURI
(musicroom.org; Music Room, 7301 Burnet Road #102-525, Austin, TX 78757)

CHRONICLE

Extra Jim

Travis County Picker, Jim Stringer

by Jim Caligiuri

Jim Stringer has been making music for almost 40 years now, though you'd never know it by spending time with him. He sure doesn't look 53 years old; he's not particularly wrinkled and has only the slightest suggestion of gray hair. In fact, Stringer could well be Austin's Dick Clark. Surely he qualifies as a local poster child for the "music keeps you young" club.

Of course you probably wouldn't recognize his unwrinkled face even if it was on such a poster. Moreover, it's a safe bet most locals don't know the name either. Non-music-playing locals that is. Mention his name to Austin's country contingent, and you'll get a chorus of nods and smiles. "One of the best guitarists in Austin" — you'll hear that one, too, particularly from the likes of Ted Roddy, Roger Wallace, Susanna Van Tassel, and Marti Brom, with whom he plays regularly. His own group, the AM Band, has held down a Thursday-night residence at the Carousel Lounge for the past three years.

"At this point in the game, Jim's one of the A-team players," says Roddy. "I love playing with him because he's an incredible and creative guitar player. He's conscious of making things musical. He's not afraid to jam and stretch out. I love all kinds of music, and Jim does too, so I can relate to him on all kinds of levels, and that's one of the joys of playing with him."

An Austinite since 1994, Stringer is no newcomer to town; his second disc, *On the Radio*, is just out, its patented "swang" a cheerful amalgam of swing and twang patterned after the good old days of radio, when all genres, from rock & roll to country, were part of the Top 40 and radio stations played it all. Considering his age, Stringer remembers such a time well.

Born in Fort Scott, Kansas, about 90 miles south of Kansas City, his family had roots in Texas going back generations. Getting the idea to play guitar, like so many others, from seeing Elvis on television in the mid-Fifties, Stringer spent his adolescence anchoring garage bands. In the Sixties, his high school bands played mostly instrumentals patterned after Duane Eddy, Link Wray, and the Ventures. He moved to Lawrence to attend the University of Kansas in 1966 and stayed there until his move to Austin 18 years later.

"Lawrence is a great music and arts town," says Stringer. "It's Austin on a one-tenth scale."

The guitarist was himself no small part of Lawrence's attraction for a time, his band Tide having built a sizable following between the Rockies and the Mississippi. Along with his new AM Band disc, Stringer has been handing out the bonus CD *Extra Jim's*, a journey through his musical past, including three tracks from Tide. Since this was the era of extended jams and Southern rock, the Tide tracks reek of patchouli with a roasty side.

"We made an attempt to never play a song the same way twice," laughs Stringer.

Tide was successful enough — "wildly popular in some places," he says — to start a music magazine as well as their own recording studio. Having overextended themselves financially, the band was on the verge of calling it quits when a Lawrence-based film company came to their rescue by using the band's music in an industrial film for General Motors. Though the money helped Tide appease its creditors, Stringer had grown tired of the road.



JOHN CARBON

Stringer could well be Austin's Dick Clark. Surely he qualifies as a local poster child for the "music keeps you young" club.

Married with a family by this time, Stringer was having trouble keeping that side of his life together. He talked to someone at the film company about a job, and was soon hired as sound man and music producer. This was a more stable form of income, but still kept him away from home a lot, and his marriage (the first of three) dissolved. He ended up writing jingles, scoring industrial films, and providing incidental music as a full-time job.

"I provided scores for 550 films and a couple hundred jingles," Stringer remembers. "I quit, because I could see that with video coming up, the end was coming for them. Industrial films today are cheap, and they look that way because they're shot on video and don't have the same production values that we were using."

During this time, he kept his guitar chops up by performing as a member and sometime-leader of a house band at the Jazz House in Lawrence. As the name implies, it was a jazz club, and gave Stringer a chance to play with the likes of Jay McShann, Art Farmer, Red Rodney, Zoot Sims, and Claude Williams. While the film company job ended in 1985, Stringer hasn't worked a regular job since.

"I developed a teleprompting system when I was there," explains the guitarist. "One particular company became interested in it [and] I developed it for them. It doesn't make me rich, but it keeps a basic level of income so I don't have to live in a box somewhere."

With Stringer free to perform full time, first came a string of bands in Lawrence, most notably the Novellas and the Stringers. The bass player and one of the vocalists for the Stringers was Sharon Ward, a sassy woman with a big voice, who moved to Austin in 1994. Stringer followed shortly thereafter.

"I came down here and did an acoustic solo

thing for a while," recalls Stringer. "Then Sharon and I got together with Karen Biller and put together *Git Gone*. The idea was to do a more traditional style of rockabilly. Karen booked us almost every night of the week. She was a real dynamo. That lasted for about a year and a half or so, then she left to go play drums with Cornell Hudson."

"It wasn't 'til she left that we knew how much we missed Karen's booking ability. But we had some good things going."

Those included a stint at Hank's Roadhouse on South Lamar until it went under and a regular Sunday evening gig at the Draught Horse, but *Git Gone* was just one facet of what Stringer was doing musically at that point. He put together a little home studio and recorded some tracks with Austin country diva Susanna Van Tassel that ended up on the locally produced compilation *The Edge of Country*.

Roddy, who also had a track on that disc, liked Van Tassel's contribution enough to contact Stringer about recording together. What started out as demos in 1997 turned into a full-on project that was finally released late last year as *Ted Roddy & the Tearjoint Troubadors' Tear Time*. Stringer also recorded most of Roger Wallace's outstanding debut *Hillbilly Heights*, Karen Poston's soon-to-be-released debut, and both AM Band CDs in the Music Room, which doubles as his living room. The Music Room also doubles as Stringer's label, which releases his albums as well as Roddy's and Poston's.

"All these little, independent labels are really after bands to tour, but they don't offer tour support," Stringer proclaims. "This is why the Music Room exists right now. It doesn't seem fair to me. The whole industry is set up to screw the artist. It's some kind of slavery mentality that says you're so privileged to be doing this for the record company that you

should be willing to go out and do it just for the glory of it."

"[They tell you that] as an artist, you shouldn't be involved in business decisions and you shouldn't be going after money. You should just do it because you're an artist. People buy into that. It's your livelihood, for crying out loud! Nobody does that. It's such a bizarre mentality. A label like HighTone can't do anything for an artist that they can't do for themselves, if they're willing to put time into it."

Incidentally, it was the Oakland-based roots label HighTone that initially released *Travis County Pickin'*, a collection of tracks featuring an all-star cast of, what else, pickers. The collection was a critical success and went a long way to establishing Stringer as one of the most creative players in town.

"The idea for it was to carry on the tradition of country jazz like Jimmy Bryant and Speedy West, Roy Lanham and James Burton," Stringer says. "I got together with Dave Biller, Joel Hamilton, Casper Rawls, Brian Hofeldt, and Scott Walls — some of the best pickers in town backed by one of the best rhythm sections: Lisa Pankratz and Kevin Smith."

Drummer Pankratz, like so many local musical peers, can't say enough good things about Stringer.

"I love playing with Jim," she crows. "I play with him regularly in three or four different bands. One thing that's great about him is he's a versatile and supportive sideman. He can adjust his style to each act, and you can always count on him to play something good. That's what I look for in a sideman and musician." ■



Jim Stringer & The AM Band

JIM STRINGER & THE AM BAND *On the Radio* (Music Room)

Gawd love Stella. The Carousel Lounge's feisty, red-haired waitress kicks off *On the Radio*, Jim Stringer's second disc, in inimitable Stella style with one of her patented intros, which only makes sense since the Austin set-up bar is the AM band's regular haunt. From there, things only get better with the easy swing of "Cedar Fever" giving guitarists Stringer and Boomer Norman and piano man T. Jarrod Bonta all a little piece of the action. There's plenty of action to go around, especially on "I Feel Better (Since You're Gone)," and the tawdry tale of "A Man Who Can't Say No." Stringer's ear for production is head and shoulders above the band's last CD, while his songwriting packs plenty of wit and his playing makes him as one of Austin's tastier Telecaster twangsters. Covers of Ray Charles' "Leave My Woman Alone" and Lieber & Stoller's "Fools Fall in Love" round out the LP. Since radio stopped playing real music a long time ago, Stringer and the boys need to take this smooth-running country-swing machine out on the road so other folks can hear it.

★★★

—Jerry Renshaw

The Austin Chronicle, October 8, 1999

LIVE SHOTS

**JIM STRINGER &
THE AUSTIN MUSIC BAND
Carousel Lounge, September 30**

If someone ever possessed an appropriate surname, it's Jim Stringer. The local professional musician is a guitarist's guitarist, deftly switching between the related styles of Western swing, rockabilly, roadhouse blues, and mid-century rockabilly. While Stringer is one-third of the post-Fifties rock & roll band Git Gone, he's also the designated strummer for other Austin artists like Susanna Van Tassel, Ted Roddy, and Wayne "The Train" Hancock. Yet even with all these musical commitments, Stringer is somehow able to front his own outfit, the generically named Austin Music (or "AM") Band. Handling lead vocal and guitar duties, Stringer fronts Carl Keesee on bass, Lee Potter on drums, T. Jarrod Bonta on piano, and Boomer Norman on guitar. The AM Band owns the Thursday night slot at the Carousel Lounge, one of the more honest-to-God unique places in Austin. Offering beer, wine, and set-ups, the VFW-shaped, circus-themed, cinderblock establishment doesn't know the meaning of term "pretentious." Where else can bands share the stage with a large pink pachyderm whose trunk is curled around a martini glass? After a few intensity-building opening numbers, the basic quintet popped off the Forties classic "Is You Is, Or Is You Ain't My Baby?" followed by a respectable version of the Gillespie/Sizemore/Biese standard "Right or Wrong," a longing song made famous by Bob Wills & His Texas Playboys. Later, they caroused through the tongue-in-cheek swing standard "Jack You're Dead," followed by a twangy rendition of the Beatles' *Rubber Soul* gem "I've Just Seen the Face." Adding a needed dimension was featured vocalist Alan Barnet, whose singing often moved the small dance floor's throng from boot-scoot to sock-hop with his smooth, Fifties-era delivery, especially on the walking bass-driven "Fools Fall In Love." Second guitarist Norman, looking more Widespread Panic than Buck Owens, was Stringer's near-equal, especially on an unannounced, jumpy twin-Telecaster instrumental that christened the second set. Stringer obviously relished the extra set of strings on stage, picking and grinning along like Junior Brown on a pedal steel. In the twisted confines of the Carousel — with such honest music emanating from the saloon's west side — one wonders where all the people were. Such a proficiently played set list would have gone down just as easily at the usually packed Continental Club. Maybe the elephant scared them away.

— David Lynch

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"I've never felt uncomfortable playing bluegrass, it's hard and I'll do it again."

goes transcendental

"My attraction to country music lyrically is the honesty"

"I'd much rather have the respect of Texas than of Tennessee."



Jim.
stringer

hank
joel
pernice



I believe you have just celebrated 40 years in the business. Can you tell us something of your background?

"I grew up in Kansas City. In the 50's, Kansas City still had some vestige of the vital music scene that made it the "place to be" in prior decades and I was exposed to some great blues, rockabilly and jazz. I began playing when I was 8, getting my first guitar for Christmas. I had seen Elvis on the Ed Sullivan show and knew I wanted to play that music! I started my first band in 1959 when I was 11... we got a gig playing at a Kentucky Derby Day party. It's been pretty much continual gigging ever since."

You have played with a lot of people over the years as well as leading Git Gone and The Austin Music band. How do you approach the different roles?

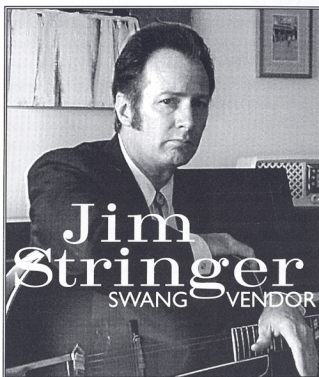
"There are two basic roles that I play - leader and sideman. I'm comfortable with either. With my own bands, I like to find sympathetic players with an original style and coordinate their talents. I never like to TELL people what to play... what would be the fun in that? It's so much more rewarding to hear what a creative person will do with good material."

As a sideman, I try to turn the table around and give the best of my creative energy to their material. The only thing that I keep away from is the situation where someone wants a player to copy someone else on record... it just not fun and is contrary to the spirit of the music."

Austin is a hotbed of musical activity for all sorts of music but observing it from the inside is live music safe in the hands of all those young guys coming up now. And who do you rate now?

"There's some very talented young players in Austin. I think Roger Wallace will be heard from

quite a bit in the coming years. Roger brings a number of influences to the table and has done well integrating them into a consistent style. His voice is powerful and he has good musical knowledge. He has the potential to take this music to the mainstream. Also, T Jarrod Bonta (who will record for The Music Room later this year) is a spectacular player. His piano skills have been sought by others, but it's his singing and his emerging song-writing that will earn him a place in everyone's CD changer. Justin Trevino is an incredible talent. Though not a prolific songwriter, he has a powerful delivery and is an outstanding musician. Susanna Van Tassel, Karen Poston both are fine singers and songwriters... there's so many others..."



The music you perform now blends rockabilly, swing, vintage country and jump blues. Have you always played this mix and where can you take it from here?

"Yes... that's pretty much what I've played throughout my life, though for several years, I played "jazz" gigs. I can make the sound, but it seems I always revert to some sort of country-rockabilly-blues idiom. I really like music with melody-that's why western-swing and vintage country are so fun to play. I don't really differentiate between the idioms... it's just playing music. It's hard for me to suppress the "rockin' gene" for long... most of my music does and will have some rockin' groove, explicit or implicit. Lyrically, I like to write about things that mean something... I can toss off a lyric (and have occasionally in the past) but I never wind up playing those songs for long... they just don't stick. My favorite songs to play and sing are tunes such as Bye Bye Bayou (written with the help of a Cajun friend who left home as a young lady) or Looking for Romeo (written with my

daughter in mind). (Looking for Romeo will be on the AM Band's new CD.)"

Do you tour alot and have you ever played in Europe?

"I've toured as a side man with various acts... Git Gone played the Vinstra Country Music Festival last summer, but the AM Band has not played in Europe yet, though I hope that will change soon... promoters -here we are!!!!"

What's your next recording project and what does the future hold for you?

"The AM Band's new CD will be out this summer. I'm finishing a project for Ted Roddy - that also will be released this summer. I'll also be producing a CD for Karen Poston, and in the fall, T Jarrod Bonta. I have hopes to do another geetar record -maybe in the vein of Travis County Pickin'. I love the music and harmonies of The Everly Brothers... I'd like to do something in that direction as well with lots of duets and cool instrumentation."

You've included a mix of originals and covers in your sets what criteria do you use to choose covers?

"I don't really have verbal criteria... I know a good song when I hear it. A cover has to be adaptable to the sound I'm looking for... groove is most important to me. Lyrics have to be consistent... I can't sing something that I can't relate to. And there's certain things that I shy away from... for example, Cheating Songs are a popular country subject, but I'm a loyal sort of fellow and I can't do those songs with any sort of conviction. And though I like to cover an occasional "falling off the barstool" song, I'd never write one. And, I'm not particularly fond of those "poetry" tunes with lyrics that are so nebulous that everyone thinks the songs is about something different. I like to write about relationships or people... the deeper the feeling, the better. And I really appreciate a sense of humor in a song."

My favorite author would have to be Mark Twain... anyone who has read Twain extensively knows he waits till you're laughing and vulnerable - then he goes straight for the heart! Yes... humor is a wonderful part of music. But the essential ingredient to music is honest of feeling and expression. The only thing I don't like is that hipper-than-thou, "wink-wink, nudge-nudge" type of humor in a

song -it seems to be the prevalent form of humor in current pop music. My attraction to country music lyrically is the honesty. I like non-lyric musical humor, too..."

Have ever had any ambitions to record or work in Nashville?

"None whatsoever... Texas country music is the real deal for me... I'm very disconcerted with the new Nashville. They've made the dollar the concert master... I really hate some of those tunes that are written in an afternoon by appointment... it makes for profit, but at the expense of soul -not a good trade."

Finally what now for Country Music?

"The country music that I love has been around in one form or another for along time... I think it'll keep on happening for awhile yet, though I don't expect it to ever be vastly profitable. The market for vintage country music and it's derivatives is small and will probably continue to be small."

I'd like to see young artists shy away from existing record labels and take charge of their careers. Right now, about 1% of the people in the industry haul in 99% of the money - and only a small portion of that 1% is the artist!!! With a little work, artists can create the music they love and believe in. To the artist: Get a loan to put out that CD... promote it yourself... keep the rights... and the MONEY... don't be afraid to learn the business... exercise both of those brain lobes!!! I the ratio could be leveraged from 1%-99% to about 10%-90%. Most serious artists could live a reasonable life style and still create vital, meaningful music. Labels will do whatever makes money... artists will do whatever makes good music."





ROOTSTOWN

Music Magazine

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**JIM STRINGER & THE
AUSTIN MUSIC BAND /
Swang / The Music
Room 9901D (45.41)**

****½

Jim Stringer
and the
Austin
Music
Band



Deze cd is in feite een uitloper van de compilatie *Travis County Pickin'*, die leuke cd waarop verschillende gitaristen hun twang met veel swing ten toon spreiden.

Uit die sessies is deze samenwerking gesproten met als lijsttrekkers gitarist/zanger Jim Stringer en pianist T Jarrod Bonta. De titel (swing & twang, dig?!) laat er geen twijfel over bestaan, hier wordt lol getrapt, genreloze muziek gemaakt, zolang er maar een voetje kan getapt en een vingertje kan geknipt worden. Geen moeite met stinkend zweterige rock 'n' lol-songs zoals *Texas And Pacific* (gitaar en piano als parende palingen), *Bye-bye Bayou* (erg leuk, die *Goin' Up The Country*-lick), *Earthquake* en *I Wanna Be In Your Dreams*, verschrikkelijk infectieuze western-jazz-billy-swingers zoals *Onward Charlie Christian's Soldiers*, *Thirty Days*, *Ninety Miles Per Hour*, *Special Delivery Stomp*, *Jack You're Dead* en *Sick Sober & Sorry* (die piano als een gekieteld eikel-tje!) En dan vergeet ik bijna *We Ran Out Of Love Baby Blue*, 36-22-36 en *No Love Have I*.

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Jim Stringer & the AM Band

On the Radio

Music Room MRCD2002

Musically, as far as Austin goes, there's a number of clubs that cater to distinct styles of music. If you're looking for blues, the best bet is usually Antone's. Singer/songwriters? The Cactus Club is the spot. For the punk and hardcore types, there's dingy watering holes like Emo's and the Red-Eyed Fly. There's the alt country and roots rock brigade which more times than not seems to make its way through joints like the Continental Club and Stubbs. And then there's the rockabilly, hill-billy and retro crew who fill the bill at cozy, off-the-beaten track dives like the Carousel Lounge and Ginny's Little Longhorn Saloon. Of the latter, familiar face musicians and singers like Jim Stringer, T. Jarrod Bonta, Roger Wallace, Roy Heinrich and Karen Poston can frequently be found on stage at each of those beer joints. A fellow who upon first seeing Elvis on the Ed Sullivan TV show in 1956 was hooked, in Jim Stringer, you

have a guitarist with some 35 years of playing/performing experience under his belt who's been through both the rock & roll and honky tonk wars and who is an almost father figure to

COMPACT CAPSULES

DAN FERGUSON

the up-and-coming talents like Bonta, Wallace, Poston, etc. He also happens to be one of the best six-stringers in a city chock full of talented players. The music of Jim Stringer and the AM Band as found on the sparkling new *On The Radio* may be rooted in the old school '50s from both the 'billy and the rockin' perspectives, yet it's an invigorating and fresh blend that doesn't come off the least bit dated. Towards that end, credit Stringer and his lock-step AM Band. Mr. Stringer, who in addition to being a hot guitarist is a decent singer and songwriter to boot, has himself a wrecking crew of talented musicians (Austin piano ace Bonta among the players) and singers (smooth-crooning Alan Barnette shines on several of the Elvis-styled flavored numbers). He and the AM Band waste no time showcasing that stellar musicianship igniting the *On The Radio* proceedings with the rollicking western swing-leaning leadoff track, an instrumental called *Cedar Fever*. From there, it's into honky tonk shuffle ala *Long Time Coming* featuring the nimble Bonta on the vocals, drivers like *That's Alright With Me* and the clever Stringer original *Looking For Romeo*, hot licks rockabilly like *A Man Who Can't Say So*, and vocal showcases for Mr. Barnette like *Don't Tell Me Goodbye*, *Any Way You Want Me* and a cover of the Drifters' *Fools Fall In Love*. In all, *On The Radio* is a record with a most definite pulse readymade for shaking and baking the night away. (The Music Room, 7301 Burnet, #102-525, Austin, TX 78757, or www.musicroom.org)



Jim Stringer & the AM Band

On the Radio

The Music Room

For this sophomore release, Jim Stringer's Austin Music Band has become the AM Band - not a radical change, although perhaps a bit more evocative of the radio band that once played as broad a range of music as he and his cohorts do. And in spite of the joke from which Stringer copped the original name of the band - "There's only one band in Austin, and everyone plays in it" - the personnel have remained the same for this record, too.

There hasn't been a remarkable change in the AM Band's music, either; Stringer et. al. move effortlessly from old time rock-and-roll to barroom country to a touch of doo wop and a little bit of Elvis, and as usual for Stringer, throw in a couple of fine western swing instrumentals to boot.

The country stuff stands out this time around, particularly the cover of Ray Charles' "Leave My Woman Alone" (in promo material, Stringer notes his preference for the Everly Brothers' version, and it shows in the countrified Everlys sound that the band brings to the cover), and the back-to-back contrast of "I Feel Better," which starts as a tear-in-your-beer lament, and morphs into an anthemic ode to male liberation, and the unalloyed weeper "Long Time Coming." In short, more of the same good music from Stringer and company.

- Stuart Munro

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Jim Stringer & the Austin Music Band
with Roger Wallace
Live at the Carousel Lounge
Giovedì 6 Gennaio 2000

Il Carousel Lounge è un piccolo ma pittoresco neighbourhood bar di East Austin frequentato normalmente da un pubblico di affezionati 'cinquantini': ciuffettoni, bobby socks, jeans con risvolto, guys and dolls dalle variegate acconciature ed emuli di Fonzie sono di casa tra i tavolini di formica ancorati ai muri laterali, ognuno con il proprio mini juke box, l'angolo delle freccette, il flipper Best Rafters, il minibowling con foto degli avventori sbalzati, la cabina telefonica interna, il bancone ornato da scaffali porta-bottiglie (di birra) a forma di giostra da cui il nome del locale. Il motivo decorativo della giostra e del circo viene ripreso per tutto il locale: acrobati e animali in stile naïf si rincorrono lungo i muri, busti di cavalli, elefanti e leoni si protendono alle spalle dei musicisti, dietro l'area

paico e sulle teste degli avventori. L'atmosfera è rilassata, i frequentatori sembrano conoscersi tutti. Non sembra proprio di essere in un club 'di culto' eppure qui hanno tenuto scena a lungo gli High Noon, mitica rockabilly band che prima di sciogliersi per futili motivi ha girato il mondo e registrato anche un Live in Giappone. E' qui che, dopo aver registrato una puntata di Austin City Limits nei primi '80, gli Stray Cats improvvisarono una serata che ancora oggi ci si ricorda. Qui si esibiscono su base quasi regolare i Mad Cowboys ed i Tearjoint Troubadours, la versione country di Ted Roddy, ed anche il bluegrass trova sovente ospitalità. Da tempo ormai la sera del giovedì è stabilmente di Jim Stringer e la sua Austin Music Band ma stasera, primo giovedì dell'anno sono attesi anche altri ospiti.

Tipico esempio di musicista 'rilocato' a Austin da altre parti del Grande Paese, Jim arriva a Austin nel 1994 da Lawrence, Kansas e si afferma velocemente con il trio rockabilly *Git Gone* proprio grazie all'appuntamento settimanale del Carousel. Al di fuori del Git Gone, Jim si dedica a progetti più ambiziosi ed eclettici. E' suo quello di *Travis County Pickin'*, un album di Country-jazz strumentale pubblicato dalla High-tone nel 1997 che rivela la sua forte propensione per lo swing. All'album partecipano molti dei giovani talenti locali: gli High Noon di Shawn Young, i Deralliers, i Leroy Brothers, Karen Biller (ora con Cornell Hurd), nienteopodimento che Lloyd Maines alla steel, Paul Skeelton, Donald Lindley ed altri. Una gran bella carta da visita. Con i nuovi arrivati, il basterista Lee Potter ed il bassista Dave Wesselski, Jim si avvia speditamente sulla strada dello swing e con l'aggiunta del pianista T Jarrad Bonta il suono della band guadagna in completezza. Gli ultimi arrivati sono il chitarrista Boomer Norman, il sostituto bassista Carl Keese ed il cantante Alan Barnett che si alterna con Jim alla parte di lead vocalist. Da quel momento le date per la band si moltiplicano ma il giovedì sera è quasi sempre dedicato al Carousel. L'orientamento prevalente è sempre più lo swing ma il repertorio spazia sulla musica d'autore e sul country, indietro fino agli anni '50. Un concerto della AM Band è un viaggio nella genuina musica americana d'autore: si riascoltano classici di Hank Snow (*90 Miles Per Hour*), di Lefty Frizzell, di Willie Nelson (*All Of Me*) e via via risalendo nel tempo, di Rodney Crowell, di Mel Tillis (*No Love Have I*). E poi ancora brani di Louis Jordan, Chuck Berry, Lynn Stewart, Artie Shaw. Qualche rivisitazione swamp (*My Baby Left Me*) introduce l'audience a due rock'n'roll di fila: *Earthquake*, cantato in solitezza da Alan Barnett con supporto di coristi, e *I Wanna Be In Your Dreams*, in stile vocale Elvis, con breaks alternati dei due chitarristi e di piano. A condurre il gioco è Jim che si dedica a chitarra e steel ma è T Jarrad che dà peso e sostanza alla musica con il suo piano passauito con energica disinvoltura dal sostegno ritmico, ai frasteggi ai breaks solistici. Boomer

Norman, capelloni a casco, occhiali, jeans di una taglia più grandi, sulla destra del boss, attende il suo momento in ogni brano per sparare il suo picking ruvido e intrigante. I brani si susseguono stringati ed essenzialmente sulla falsariga del CD con frequenti digressioni su un repertorio razzato ovunque tra le colline del Tennessee e le rive del Rio Grande in un arco di tempo che compie



almeno 60 anni. Il filtro di interpretazione della musica è quello personale della AM Band, la loro marca di twang e swing che diventa peculiarmente *Swang*, come dal titolo del CD. Salutate dall'applauso dei presenti salgono sul palco le Casey Sisters. Le avevo già notate tra il pubblico per il look curioso: giunonica, calzettine bianche, pettinature modellate a bigodi stile Olivia. Inaspettatamente, almeno per me, si esibiscono in una frizzante *I Wanna Be A Cowboy's Sweetheart*

sforando un invidiabile impasto vocale in duetto. In platea, entusiasmo alle stelle. Le Casey Sisters si riaccomodano timidamente al tavolino. La sorpresa di metà concerto si chiama Roger Wallace, un nuovo protagonista della scena di Austin che, per qualche ragione, è già un culto in Italia. La serata ci confermerà che l'aspettativa è ben riposta ma colpisce, vedendolo da vicino, l'aria da ragazzino timido: faccia giovanissima che risalta senza il cappello, alto, capelli corti quasi a spazzola, camicia di jeans e scarpe da ginnastica. Un veloce cambio di assetto sul palco lascia posto a Lisa Pankratz batterista dei Troubadours di Ted Roddy e a Brad Fordham al basso. Jim Stringer mantiene la sua posizione. La prima cosa che si nota è la voce: calda, profonda, fa contrasto con il suo aspetto e ci ricorda quella del giovane

Faron Young. Poi viene la musica: è una meravigliosa cascata di honky tonk music quella che Wallace ci rovescia addosso. Si parte con *Ragged But Right* e *Crazy Love* poi Stringer riprende lo spotlight per cantare *Gone Gone Gone*. La successione dei brani è serrata: è la volta di *First Train Headed South* (Johnny Horton), *Last Word in Lonesome* (Roger Miller) e poi ancora una bella *Get Rhythm*, sul tempo della versione classica di Johnny Cash, con un bello scambio di battute tra chitarra elettrica, steel e chitarra acustica, e le più recenti *Undo The Right* di Wade Hayes, che rivela la grande dinamica vocale del nostro per la sequenza di toni alti e bassi su cui è costruita la canzone, e *You're The One* della Carlene Carter. Tra uno swing ed uno di cui diremo più sotto, e l'altra, i brani del suo primo CD di cui diremo più sotto, si popola di two-steppers che non se ne andranno più fino alla fine del concerto. Un'ora mi è bastata per capire che dopo le rivelazioni degli anni scorsi, Deralliers e Dale Watson, quest'anno è proprio lui, Roger Wallace, per quanto ancora acerbo nel porgersi ad un pubblico e malgrado la fortissima concorrenza, l'uomo dell'anno.



shuffler, tra una cover e l'altra, i brani del suo primo CD di cui diremo più sotto, si popola di two-steppers che non se ne andranno più fino alla fine del concerto. Un'ora mi è bastata per capire che dopo le rivelazioni degli anni scorsi, Deralliers e Dale Watson, quest'anno è proprio lui, Roger Wallace, per quanto ancora acerbo nel porgersi ad un pubblico e malgrado la fortissima concorrenza, l'uomo dell'anno.

Fabrizio Salmonti